2: Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EEl Bulgaria EEl

assets. They could do hard work; they could run countless errands. 858
Later, they were the heirs to the father's fields and the chief support of the parents in their declining years.

One of the first women I interviewed about family life told me: "I had a little boy but he died when forty days old. Now I cannot help crying every St. George's Day [May 6] and every St. Dimiter's Day [November 8] when my husband goes out to hire a boy to care for our sheep. If my son had lived, he could have taken care of the sheep for us."

Later on in the course of a conversation with a garrulous *baba* I asked her if she did not think her seven children too many for one woman to have. She snorted, pointed out of the window to her sons unloading wood they had gathered in the forest, and said: "If I hadn't had lots of children, who would go to get our wood?"

Sons were greater economic assets than girls but even so would 858
have normally received more attention in this man-centered society. 562
As parents often had to go to some expense to get their daughters 593
married off, they were always jubilant at the arrival of a son. The good-natured priest was occasionally the butt of a number of sly jests because he had three daughters and no son. One man in particular, Stefan, who had been in the same predicament, had recently acquired a son, who was now the apple of his eye. He was fond of his daughters, but made no secret of his particular pride in his boy. I thoroughly enjoyed a conversation between Stefan and the priest in which Stefan fully explained how to be sure the next one was a boy. I have known of fathers who refused to look at the newly arrived infant upon learning that it was a girl. Of course, they eventually acquiesced and simply hoped for better luck next time. Where parents had no sons, village curiosity reached a peak when a new child was expected, and an occasional wager was laid on the possibility of it being a boy. But favoritism was the exception rather than the rule. When you asked a Dragalevtsy parent which child he liked best he responded: "I like them all equally; they are just like the fingers on one's hand." He often added the proverb, "The fingers on one's hand feel pain equally, do they not?"

Whenever a child suffered from a physical or mental handicap 732
Dragalevtsy parents, like most parents around the world, were more 593
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solicitous than they would have been if the child were normal. A peasant named Vladimir once invited me to his home for what I thought was to be a chat about life in general. We walked through the sturdy gate, slushed through the mud in the yard, and lowered our heads as we entered the house's one large room. The children scurried out of our way while Yurdanka, his wife, offered us each a low three-legged stool. Not far from the stove in the center of the room I saw in the dim light what appeared to be a teen-aged girl, drooling and entirely oblivious to our presence. Vladimir, Yurdanka, and I talked about many things while their younger children sat on the bed and listened intently. Then the father brought up the matter of their feeble-minded daughter:

"*Tova e nashe neshtastie*" (This is our misfortune), he said. And then he told me her story. Some illness, probably meningitis, had arrested her mental development at an early age. Doctors had given them no hope and they wondered if I, a foreigner, knew of something they could do. Their faces showed the suffering that had touched their lives: the comments of misunderstanding, superstitious neighbors, and the constant attention they had to pay to the child's physical needs. Truly she was their misfortune. I knew that the treatment of the mentally deficient and mentally ill in Bulgaria was still in that tragic stage where the unfortunates were confined and given almost no scientific treatment. The parents wanted more than that. It was with a heavy heart that I left them, for their misfortune was not only that of economic loss, but of seeing a wasted life sharing the one living room of the tiny house.

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The child, whether grown or small, approached the father through the mother. Though not universally the case, most Dragalevtsy children told their mother what they wanted and then asked her to relay this request to the father. The mother did so quite willingly, for she felt much closer to the children than the father. In this way the distance between father and children was traditionally maintained, increasing filial respect.

There were accepted ways for children to show their respect to the parents. The traditional patterns all centered around the father: standing up when he entered the room; waiting for him to eat first;